

Judicial Branch of Georgia Day on the Bench Program

PROGRAM NARRATIVE

The Day on the Bench Program is designed to give legislators a personal understanding of the complexity of the daily duties and responsibilities of the judge. This experience is intended to impress upon legislators the significant role played by the courts in the justice system, the impact on the daily lives of our citizens, and the need for legislative support. It is anticipated that this deeper understanding of the difficult job given to our courts will come to mind as legislative decisions are made especially during the final hours of the session. It is also anticipated that this experience will strengthen the relationship between court personnel and local legislators. The Administrative Office of the Courts can provide assistance to courts with the planning, implementation and follow-up of the Day on the Bench Program.

PROPOSED AGENDA

It is imperative that the experience be carefully planned and executed. Attached is a proposed agenda to be used. It is suggested that the day begin with breakfast, during which the judge will explain the judicial system, the types of cases to be observed, the types of decisions made for each case type to be observed, and the role of the various actors in the courtroom. The judge should also explain that the legislator's presence will not be announced in the courtroom.

It is essential that the court calendar on the day of the visit demonstrate the high volume of cases brought before the court on any given day, or, in lower volume courts, the variety of work and breadth of the law handled by the judge. The visiting legislator should take away from this experience a sense of the number of cases, the volume of people, the variety of personnel, the difficulty of decisions, the pressure of time and complexity of the work done. It is recommended to have the legislators spend no more than 20 – 30 minutes in any particular courtroom or type of case.

The court session should be followed by a debriefing session, where questions about the morning can be answered and district and statewide issues can be discussed. This session should be held over lunch with other invited guests, e.g. chief judge, court administrator, clerk of court, or other criminal justice system leaders in attendance.

KEY MESSAGES

The following key messages should be emphasized during the visit:

- ❖ The work of the courts has a major impact on the lives of all citizens
 - Court decisions have an impact on every area of life from birth to marriage to death; in conflict resolution regarding business, criminal activity, social movements, and individual rights.
- ❖ Citizens deserve fair and equal treatment and service from the system.
- ❖ Adequate and stable resources are essential to a court system that is able to serve the public.
 - The tougher the times, economically and socially, the more resources the court needs.
 - Less than one percent of the state budget is appropriated to the judicial branch.

Judicial Branch of Georgia Day on the Bench Program

How-To

Invitation

It is important to meet with all the interested parties to determine a date to invite legislators when calendars are full and/or varied. Once a date is determined, an invitation letter signed by all the judges should be sent to each individual legislator from your delegation. The letter should include what the program is about, why the legislators would want to participate and the date time and a brief agenda for the activities for the day. [SEE ATTACHMENT A] A follow up confirmation letter with more detail may be needed to ensure attendance.

Materials

Briefing material for the legislators should be given out at the beginning of the day. The material should include an agenda, biographies for each judge (along with a picture if available), a description or chart of the court system, and any other material specific to the local area.

Sample Agenda

8:00 a.m. Coffee and breakfast with the legislator in chambers

This time will be used to explain the following to the legislator:

- Court operations
- The types of cases to be heard during the court session, the paper and information you will receive and the typical issues involved for each case type
- The role of the various personnel in the courtroom

9:00 a.m. Court Session

9:00 – 9:20 – Traffic Cases

9:30 – 10:00 – Plea Hearings

10:10 – 10:30 – Probation Revocation

10:40 – 11:00 – Civil Jury Trial

11:10 – 11:30 – Civil Motions/Trial

12:00 p.m. Answer questions the legislator may have about what he/she has seen – *Break for Lunch*
The lunch session should be used to answer question for the legislator and to discuss local and state issues of concern to the judiciary. Other justice system representatives can be invited. The judge should explain what judges do when they are not on the bench (why the dark courtroom) and what he/she will be doing that afternoon.

1:00 p.m. Session is concluded.

If the legislator desires, the session can be expanded into the afternoon with additional court observation and/or a tour of the court facility.

Follow-up

Evaluation is a part of every program. Follow-up with evaluation forms for both the legislators and the judges participating. [SEE ATTACHMENTS B AND C] From time to time the legislators will request information that the AOC can provide. The *Request Information Form* [SEE ATTACHMENT D] is a great way to capture the information the legislators are requesting and get the information to them in an efficient manner. You may also want to do follow-up press release with your local newspaper. This is a great way to garner positive press for both the legislators and the judges. Please make certain that all parties mentioned in the press release have given you their expressed consent to use their name. It is also helpful to have everyone mentioned in the press release review it before sent to the press.

SAMPLE INVITE LETTER

Dear Legislator:

It is our privilege to invite you to the [Name of Court] for a *Day on the Bench*. As a member of the [Name of County] Legislative Delegation, you have been selected to shadow your local judges of the [Name of Court]. This will provide you with an opportunity to receive a first-hand look at the role of a judge, the issues that are handled in court and the day-to-day operations of a courtroom.

The program is scheduled for [Insert Date]. There will be a brief introduction at 8:45 a.m. and you will begin the program at 9:00 a.m. in a courtroom. The agenda will allow you to observe jury and non-jury matters as well as criminal and civil proceeding [describe the agenda here].

We will serve a light lunch and conclude the program at 1:00 p.m.

We hope you will be able to join us in the program designed to enhance our partnership in serving the public. Please RSVP to [Insert Name] at [Insert Contact Information] by [Insert Date]. If you have any questions about Day on the Bench please call [Insert Judge's Name] at [Phone Number].

Regards,

DAY ON THE BENCH LEGISLATOR EVALUATION FORM

LEGISLATOR: _____

HOST COURT: _____ DATE OF VISIT: _____

What were the most positive aspects of the visit?

How will this visit help you in your role as a legislator?

In your opinion, how can the Day on the Bench program be improved?

Is there any information that you would like as a result of your meeting?

Overall thoughts?

☐ Check here if you have requested further information from your Host Judge.

.....

Please send the completed form to:
Administrative Office of the Courts
Governmental Affairs Department
244 Washington Street, Suite 300
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
FAX: 404-651-6449

DAY ON THE BENCH HOST COURT EVALUATION FORM

HOST JUDGE: _____ COURT: _____

LEGISLATOR: _____ DATE OF VISIT: _____

What were the most positive aspects of the visit?

In your opinion, how can the Day on the Bench program be improved?

Were the materials provided (Planning Guide, Suggested Agenda, Background Information) sufficient for the court visit?

Please list any additional comments or suggestions for future court visits. (Please attach pages if additional space is needed.)

Is there any information that you would like as a result of your meeting?

☐ Check here if the legislator request information and attach "Legislator's Request for Information" form.

.....

Please send the completed form to:
Administrative Office of the Courts
Governmental Affairs Department
244 Washington Street, Suite 300
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
FAX: 404-651-6449

DAY ON THE BENCH

LEGISLATOR'S REQUEST FOR INFORMATION FORM

LEGISLATOR: _____ COURT: _____

HOST COURT: _____ DATE OF VISIT: _____

Legislator requested information on the following areas (please check all that are applicable):

- ☐ Pending Legislation (Please list bill number below)
- ☐ Future Legislation
- ☐ Local Legislation
- ☐ Appropriations
- ☐ Printed Documents
- ☐ Other (list below)

Legislator's request for information (please provide details including bill numbers, issue topics and other important information):

.....

Please send the completed form to:
Administrative Office of the Courts
Governmental Affairs Department
244 Washington Street, Suite 300
Atlanta, Georgia 30334
FAX: 404-651-6449